

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JENNIFER HOMENDY
CHAIR AND MEMBER, NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES SENATE
APRIL 10, 2024**

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as you consider my nomination to serve as Chair and Board Member of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). I am grateful to President Biden for the confidence he has placed in me through these renominations.

I am especially honored to testify today alongside my longtime friend and colleague, Patrick Fuchs, who served this Committee during my tenure on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. He has been an incredible leader on all matters before the Surface Transportation Board, and I am pleased the President has renominated Patrick and encourage the Committee to consider his swift reconfirmation.

Before I begin, I'd like to introduce my husband, Mike, and my daughter, Lexi, and thank them for their unfailing patience, encouragement, and support. We often forget that the sacrifices we make – being on call, working 24/7 and traveling to tragedies at a moment's notice – have an impact on those closest to us. I am, however, in excellent company with our agency's personnel, who often miss birthdays, holidays, graduations, and important personal events to respond to accidents and other significant events with one goal in mind, our mission: to determine how and why a tragedy happened, to prevent it from reoccurring, to save lives, which is why it has been the absolute greatest honor of my career – my lifetime – to serve as a Member of the NTSB since

August 2018 and as Chair since August 2021. To me, these roles are not a “job;” serving the American people—and working with each of you to transform transportation safety, prevent accidents and injuries, and save lives—is my calling, my passion.

From day one as Chair, I’ve been guided by two words: mission first. When I became Chair, I met with employees throughout the agency to listen to what they believed were our greatest needs and challenges. What I heard was: we had a budget and headcount that had been stagnant for decades. We had nearly 60 vacancies, which required our workforce to do more with less. Our backlog of investigative reports and Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) cases were unacceptably high. We didn’t have reliable data to drive our decision making. We were more focused on providing training to our safety partners than we were our own staff. Their concerns became my vision for the agency. My role is to serve. That includes, first and foremost, serving our world-renowned workforce.

I’m incredibly proud to say all that has changed, with the support of my staff, Kelly Hessler and Stephen Stadius, NTSB’s unrivaled senior executive leadership, without whom none of our agency’s many achievements would be possible—Dana Schulze, Doline Hatchett, Brian Curtis, Jennifer Adler, Ed Benthall, Randee Artis, Tom McMurray, Veronica Marshall, Michael Anthony, Tim LeBaron, Rob Molloy, Eric Stolzenberg, Mike Hiller, John DeLisi, and Barbara Czech — my Board colleagues, Member Graham, Member Chapman, our newest Members Brown and Inman, and all the hardworking NTSB staff.

In 2017, we hired just 7 people; last year, we hired 71 talented professionals, including our first-ever Chief Human Capital Officer, to fill vacancies, address attrition from retirements, and meet increasing demands on our modal offices, bringing our onboard headcount to 430. These are modest increases when you consider the rising demands on our staff with increasingly complex investigations...2,200 domestic and 450 foreign cases every year, in every mode of transportation.

We eliminated the backlog of investigative reports over two years old, from a high of 442 to zero at the end of Fiscal Year 23. Our ALJs didn't only decrease *their* case backlog...they also eliminated it.

The only reason I have these impressive numbers to share with you is because we developed and implemented our first-ever agency-wide data program, which is led by our first-ever Chief Data Officer, Warren Randolph, and first-ever Chief Data Scientist, Loren Groff, who has been instrumental in helping us transform the agency.

Armed with the right data, we can now identify and remediate bottlenecks in our operations. As a result, we've seen dramatic decreases in our time-to-hire, and the average age of open investigation reports is also down across all modes: from 388 days in 2021 to 296 days as of March 18, 2024.

Finally, we've done a great deal to keep pace with the rapid change and technological advancement taking place in transportation. It starts by investing in our people, who need the right training and equipment to conduct cutting-edge investigations in this changing landscape, both of

which we've done. On top of that internal progress, we've strengthened our relationships with our external Federal partners and stakeholders. Since I became Chair, I have met with all our external stakeholders in every mode of transportation to get their feedback, not on what we are doing right, but how we can improve, be better accountable to the public, and deliver on our safety mission, and, as a result, we've made some great changes, including getting back to the office following max telework.

COVID-19 presented challenges to our workforce and in carrying out our mission. We stopped launching to accidents and other events. After I became Chair, we safely returned to the office in February 2022, a full 6 months to a year ahead of most Federal agencies and, I've taken the approach that, no matter what is occurring, we have a mission to carry out, one that cannot, should not, be deterred.

In addition to providing agency leadership, I'm proudly a fierce advocate for improving safety in all modes of transportation. I've debated and approved numerous investigation reports, provided expert testimony at the federal and state levels, held events on roadway and aviation safety, and launched with the NTSB "Go Team" on numerous investigations, including the September 2018 overpressurization of a gas distribution pipeline system in Merrimack Valley, Massachusetts (training launch); the December 2018 experimental plane crash in Fredericksburg, Virginia; the February 2019 natural gas pipeline explosion in San Francisco, California; the May 2019 mid-air collision in Ketchikan, Alaska; the June 2019 skydiving plane crash in Mokuiaia, Hawaii; the September 2019 fire and subsequent sinking of the *Conception* dive vessel off Santa Cruz Island, California; the October 2019 crash of a B-17 "living history" flight in Hartford,

Connecticut; the January 2020 large motorcoach crash near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the January 2020 helicopter crash in Calabasas, California; the January 2022 collapse of Fern Hollow Bridge in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the June 2022 grade crossing collision involving an Amtrak train in Mendon, Missouri; the September 2022 float plane crash and sinking in Mutiny Bay, Washington; the November 2023 commercial motor vehicle collision with a motorcoach transporting high school students in Etna, Ohio; the November 2023 collision of a commuter train with standing equipment in Chicago, Illinois; the January 2024 collision of two New York City Transit trains in New York, New York; and, the January 2024 accident involving the expulsion of a door plug on a commercial plane near Portland, Oregon.

On scene, my most important duty is to brief the families on what is often the worst day of their lives. It's why I fight so hard for NTSB safety recommendations...why I take our oversight role of DOT modal administrations so seriously: because I've looked too many bereaved spouses, parents, siblings, friends, and colleagues in the eye following tragedy. That is why I fight so hard for change...why everyone at the NTSB does.

I am honored to have been renominated to build on this important work and if confirmed, I pledge to work diligently with my fellow Board Members, the dedicated NTSB staff, and this Committee to lead the agency in carrying out our critical safety mission by conducting thorough, fact-based investigations to save lives, as well as continuing to serve as a fierce advocate for improving transportation safety.

The NTSB and this Committee have partnered over the years to address myriad safety gaps identified through our investigations. It has been a privilege to be a part of that partnership and I look forward to continuing its growth, should I be confirmed for another term as Chair and Member.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to answering your questions.